
BZA-1877
PURDUE FARMHOUSE ASSOCIATION
Variances

STAFF REPORT
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REQUEST MADE, PROPOSED USE, LOCATION:

Petitioner, represented by Joseph Bumbleburg of Ball Eggleston and with Schneider Engineering, is requesting the following variances (after demolition of the existing structure) for reconstruction of a proposed fraternity house:

1. To permit an increase in building height of 39' instead of the maximum permitted 14' (UZO 2-10-11);
2. To reduce the required number of parking spaces from the required 42 to 32 (UZO 4-6-3);
3. To reduce vegetative coverage from the minimum required 30% to 25.8% (UZO 2-10-7); and
4. To permit a front setback of 4' instead of the required 60' along West State Street, a primary arterial (UZO 4-2-2)

on property located at the northwest corner of State and Russell Streets at 1028 West State Street. The R3W zoned property is located in the City of West Lafayette, Wabash 19(NW)23-4.

AREA ZONING PATTERNS:

The site is zoned R3W, multi-family residential in West Lafayette. This portion of the city, which includes Russell, Waldron and University Streets from State to Stadium, is zoned the same, with the exception of a few pockets of PDRS (Planned Development Residential) zoning. Agricultural zoning, associated with Purdue's campus surrounds to the south and west of the site.

The most recent ABZA activity in the area was 7 years ago; a sorority was granted a vegetative coverage variance to 27.1% instead of 30% (BZA-1716).

AREA LAND USE PATTERNS:

An existing fraternity house is on this property, located at the western edge of the city limits of West Lafayette; Purdue's campus is located to the west and south.

This area of the City—the "Island" of Russell, Waldron and University from South to Stadium—contains multi-family apartments, university buildings, fraternities and sororities.

The subject property encompasses parts of four platted lots in the original University Park subdivision. Because building over property lines is not permitted in the city of West Lafayette, petitioner must replat into one lot to construct the building as proposed.

Petitioner may need to dedicate more right-of-way to the public if the existing right-of-way is insufficient. This would affect the variance request, and, as all variances approved are site-plan specific, petitioner should replat the subject property before proceeding with any variance request.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION:

The site is located at the northwest corner of Russell Street, a one-way in this location headed southbound, and West State Street (a primary arterial). Entrance to the property and its parking is only from First Street, located north of the site. Access to the site will not change.

The UZO parking standard for fraternities and sororities is .75 spaces per occupant at capacity. The petition indicates 56 students at maximum occupancy, requiring 42 spaces; the submitted site plan shows 32 on site. However, directly adjacent to the west is a parking lot owned by the University. This lot has no access onto State Street and appears as if it provides parking for the residential uses in this block face. Petitioner's representative believes there is an off-site parking agreement between Farmhouse and Purdue. Staff estimates nearly 30 spaces are located adjacent to Farmhouse—more than sufficient to meet the requirements of the ordinance and provides nearly one per occupant. Whether or not Purdue has a formal agreement with petitioner (or petitioner can obtain one that promises nearly 30 spaces) has yet to be seen. Forty-two bicycle spaces are provided.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The R3W zone requires 30% minimum vegetative cover. Petitioner's lot is 23,215 sq. ft. with 6,004 sq. ft. of greenspace, a coverage of only 25.8%. To meet ordinance requirements, petitioner would have to install roughly 900 more square feet of greenspace, the size of about a parking space and a half of grass or other landscape cover. Staff bemoans the loss of two massive trees at the corner of Russell and State and reminds petitioner West Lafayette's greenspace ordinance must also be met.

STAFF COMMENTS:

An existing cooperative house built in the 1960s is located on the subject property. The Farmhouse Association proposes razing the structure and building a new, four-story residential fraternity house on the site. The current house looks dated and uninspired. The proposed building's architecture, while still uninspired, does fit in better with the nearby fraternities and sororities at the corner of these busy streets.

The Purdue University Master Plan recognizes that this area, called the "Island," is a "unique zone that hosts a variety of organizational and cooperative housing, private housing as well as religious organizations. At least two-thirds of the property in the Island is privately owned. Its inhabitants appreciate its unique neighborhood and residential scale." The Plan also calls for State Street to be transformed into a "vibrant, connective, mixed-use corridor." Redevelopment of this 60s era use that now looks more institutional than residential will help further that goal. The recent completion of Marriott Hall, one block east of the subject property, a LEED-certified, urban style

building with a front setback of only 18' advances the University and community's vision of State Street.

In 2010, staff and West Lafayette City staff presented changes to both parking standards and building height in the Village and campus-proximate area. While Ordinance Amendment #68 met its demise at West Lafayette City Council (though approved by all other jurisdictions), staff still feels its recommendations have merit. Parking standards were proposed at one space per bedroom, and the height limitations in the R3W zone were raised from 14' at the finished floor of the upper story to 35' which matches the standard of the R3 zone.

If staff's observations are correct, and petitioner is using at least 24 spaces on the adjacent Purdue parking lot, the one space per occupant recommendation can be met (56 occupants, 32 spaces on site with the additional 24 off-site for a total of 56) and the variance would not be needed. However, if petitioner is not able to secure quite that many spaces, only 12 additional parking spaces are required to meet the current ordinance requirement for a fraternity (pending an off-site parking agreement approval from the West Lafayette City Engineer). If 12 spaces can be obtained, the site plan can be redesigned adding enough greenspace to meet the ordinance—negating the need for the vegetative cover variance as well.

In recent negotiations for Planned Development near campus, staff has held the position that parking should be one per bedroom. While the ordinance does not call for that stringent a standard for a fraternity house, staff cannot recommend approval of reducing the required parking at an already densely populated corner.

Again, drawing from the Purdue Campus Master Plan, State Street should not be a divider between north and south campuses, but a “unifying element with the potential to provide....a front-door presence for all facets of University life.” The University's vision for State Street is a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented street with architecture that both frames open space and creates a sense of place. Had Ordinance Amendment #68 gone through, the height standard in R3W would have been 35 feet. Staff cannot support a variance exceeding that height, a variance to 35' represents minimum relief and is supportable. Staff cannot recommend approval of reducing greenspace on this highly visible lot in the middle of campus. Additionally, West Lafayette plans on expanding their Green Initiative in “The Island” which promotes the installation of green infrastructure to “improve stormwater quality and environmental sustainability.” Reducing greenspace goes against this important initiative.

When reviewing a proposed development and discovering that a project would need not only a replat but four variances, staff will suggest to the petitioner that the project might be better served by the planned development process. In this instance, though, there is nothing about the proposed development that fosters innovative and diverse design. A simple redesign and rescaling of the structure could meet ordinance requirements (or bring the project to a level that staff could support through variance) and securing an off-site parking agreement would bring the project into compliance with the parking

standards and provide an opportunity for a redesign to add sufficient greenspace.

At this juncture, staff feels there are several unresolved issues:

- Petitioner must replat; will there be an additional dedication of right-of-way required?
- Is there a parking agreement with Purdue?
- If so, can petitioner redesign the site to meet the greenspace requirement?
- Can the project's scale be reduced to 35' height to represent minimum relief?

Staff cannot make a recommendation to the Board without resolutions to these issues.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Continuance